

# **Maurice Hinchey NEWS**

## **26<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT, NEW YORK**

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### **DRILLING IN FINGER LAKES NATIONAL FOREST TO BE BANNED FOR ONE YEAR**

WASHINGTON - U.S. Representative Maurice Hinchey (NY-26) today applauded a joint House-Senate conference committee for agreeing to a one-year ban on oil and gas drilling in the Finger Lakes National Forest. The ban is included in the conference report for the Energy and Water Appropriations bill that the House of Representatives is expected to pass later today.

"This is a victory for the protection of the Finger Lakes National Forest," said Hinchey. "Congress is sending a clear message to the Forest Service that the New York delegation strongly opposes drilling in the FLNF. The Forest Service should heed this message and refrain from any alternative that favors drilling."

The FLNF was established by an Act of Congress in 1983 and has since become a popular destination for hikers, campers, horseback riders, and nature enthusiasts. It is also used for hunting, fishing, skiing and snowmobiling in the colder months. The U.S. Forest Service is currently proposing leasing 13,000 of the FLNF's 16,000 acres for oil and natural gas drilling. A final decision on this proposal is expected in December.

The Senate version of the fiscal year 2002 Energy and Water Appropriations bill included a provision to permanently prohibit drilling in the FLNF. Hinchey and a bipartisan group of his upstate colleagues wrote a letter in September urging the House to adopt this language in the final version of the bill. The bill that emerged from the conference committee today for consideration by the full House states that no federal permit or lease shall be issued for oil and gas drilling in the FLNF during fiscal year 2002.

"I would have preferred to have the permanent ban, but generally appropriations bills address one fiscal year," said Hinchey. "Considering the Bush Administration's preference for drilling on all of our public lands and the opposition of the House subcommittee chairman to a ban, the enactment of any ban is a remarkable accomplishment. If the Forest Service continues to pursue a plan to drill in the FLNF, I will seek to pass a similar ban next year."